Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PARIS 16108 01 OF 02 192248Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
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P R 192217Z MAY 78
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1842
INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
AMCONSUL LYON
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE
AMCONSUL NICE
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 16108

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PERP, PINT, CG, FR
SUBJECT: LEGIONNAIRES TO ZAIRE -- INITIAL POLITICAL
REACTIONS

SUMMARY. FOLLOWING THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE GOF'S DECI-
SION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE JOINT EVACUATION MISSION
THURSDAY, MAY 18, SOCIALIST PARTY LEADER MITTERRAND
DEMANDED AN IMMEDIATE EXPLANATION AND JUSTIFICATION OF
THE ACTION. DEFENSE MINISTER BOURGES PRESENTED THE
GOVERNMENT'S POSITION TO THE ASSEMBLY THURSDAY EVENING.
REACTIONS OF GAULLISTS AND SOCIALISTS WERE HOSTILE IN
TONE BUT DID NOT FLATLY CONDEMN THE OPERATION, JUSTIFIED
BY THE GOF ON THE BASIS OF SAVING THE LIVES OF FRENCH
CITIZENS AND OTHER FOREIGNERS IN KOLWEZI. THE COMMU-
NISTS TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONDEMN GISCARD'S "INTER-
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PAGE 02 PARIS 16108 01 OF 02 192248Z

NATIONIST" POLICIES -- CHAD, WESTERN SAHARA, ETC. THE
GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE ASSEMBLY WAS REMARKABLE FOR
BOTH ITS RAPIDITY AND WILLINGNESS TO JUSTIFY A DECISION
TO THE OPPOSITION. GISCARD IS TO APPEAR ON TV AT 2000
MAY 19 TO PRESENT HIS CASE TO THE PEOPLE. END SUMMARY.

1. THE OPPOSITION: AT THE BEGINNING OF THE ASSEMBLY'S

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

EVENING SESSION THURSDAY, PS LEADER MITTERRAND VIOLATED THE ASSEMBLY'S FIXED ORDER OF BUSINESS AND DEMANDED AN IMMEDIATE EXPLANATION BY THE GOF OF ITS DECISION TO SEND TROOPS TO ZAIRE. HE SAID HE WAS ASTONISHED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD TAKE SUCH A DECISION WITHOUT CONSULTING THE ASSEMBLY AND DEMANDED THAT IT RESPOND. A COMMUNIST PARTY SPOKESMAN SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTION WAS ILLEGAL, WAS ANOTHER INDICATION OF GISCARD'S INTERVENTIONIST POLICIES AND DEMANDED A FULL EXPLANATION AND OPEN DEBATE. ANOTHER PS DEPUTY (TADDEI) NOTED THAT FRANCE'S ACTION, IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY JUSTIFICATION UNDER A MILITARY ASSISTANCE AGREEMENT WITH ZAIRE CONSTITUTED AN ACT OF WAR, WHICH ONLY THE PARLIAMENT CAN AUTHORIZE UNDER ARTICLE 35 OF THE CONSTITUTION (DECLARATION OF WAR POWER).

2. RPR - FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER AND PRESIDENT OF THE ASSEMBLYS COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS MAURICE COUVE DE MURVILLE SUPPORTED TADDEI'S POSITION AND QUESTIONED THE LEGITIMACY OF THE GOVERNMENT ACTION. HE NOTED THAT THIS TYPE OF INTERVENTION IS NOT JUSTIFIABLE UNDER ANY EXISTING MILITARY AGREEMENTS WITH ZAIRE APPROVED BY THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND THEREFORE OPENED THE GOVERNMENT TO A POSSIBLE MOTION OF CENSURE.

3. GOF POSITION - MIN DEFENSE BOURGES PRESENTED THE CONFIDENTIAL

GOF'S POSITION TO THE ASSEMBLY BEGINNING AT 2300 THURSDAY EVENING. BOURGES STATED THAT QUOTE IT WAS NOT A QUESTION OF MILITARY INTERVENTION ON ZAIRE, OR OF AN ACT OF WAR. IT WAS ONLY A QUESTION OF TAKING PROPER MEASURES TO GUARANTEE THE SECURITY OF OUR FELLOW CITIZENS BY THE SENDING OF AN APPROPRIATE MILITARY FORCE END QUOTE. GOF AND OTHER EUROPEAN STATES INVOLVED (INCLUDING THE US) WERE ONLY RESPONDING TO A LEGITIMATE APPEAL BY THE GOZ FOR ASSISTANCE IN SAFEGUARDING THE LIVES OF THEIR CITIZENS. THE OBJECTIVE IS TO REPATRIATE EUROPEANS, NOT TO BECOME INVOLVED IN COMBAT, BOURGES SAID.

4. RESPONDING FOR THE PS, MICHEL ROCARD, A TOP PS OFFICIAL, NOTED THAT IT WAS HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT PROTECTING FRENCH CITIZENS WAS THE ONLY REASON FOR THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION, AND IN ANY EVENT, INVOLVING FRENCH FORCES IN AN INTERNAL WAR WAS NOT THE BEST MEANS OF PROTECTING FRENCH CITIZENS. HE ALSO POINTED OUT THAT IT WAS DIFFICULT FOR FRANCE TO EMBARK ON A GRAND OFFENSIVE FOR DISARMAMENT WHEN IT WAS WILLING TO SEND OUT ITS TROOPS ON 24 HOURS NOTICE WITH BOTHERING TO CONSULT ITS PARLIAMENT. FRANCE IS NOT THE WORLD'S GENDARME.

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

5. COMMENT: LAYING ASIDE THE QUESTION OF THE MILITARY
OPERATION, THE EVENING DEBATE WAS INTERESTING FOR TWO

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PAGE 01 PARIS 16108 02 OF 02 192237Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 PARIS 16108

REASONS. FIRST, THE GOVERNMENT RESPONDED IMMEDIATELY
TO A DEMAND FOR JUSTIFICATION OF ITS DECISION, MADE BY
A LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION. NOT ONLY IS THIS REMARKABLE
AS A "COMMAND" PERFORMANCE BY THE DEFENSE MINISTER AND
THE PRESENCE OF THE PRIME MINISTER AT 11 P.M., BUT IS
PERCEIVED AS A FURTHER INDICATION OF THE WILLINGNESS TO
DIALOGUE. SECOND, THE QUESTIONING OF THE GOVERNMENT'S
DECISION ON CONSTITUTIONAL GROUNDS BY THE PS, SUPPORTED
BY THE RPR, IS INTERESTING AS A POLITICAL EVENT AND A
POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS ONE IF THE GOVERNMENT IS CHAL-
LENGED AT A LATER DATE.

6. CONCLUSION: GISCARD IS TO APPEAR ON TELEVISION
FRIDAY AT 2000 MAY 19, IN THE EVENING, TO EXPLAIN THE

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

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GOF'S DECISION TO THE PUBLIC. THE JUSTIFICATION WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE TO SAVE THE LIVES OF FRENCH CITIZENS CAUGHT IN A DANGEROUS SITUATION, IN COOPERATION WITH OTHER GOVERNMENTS ATTEMPTING THE SAME GOAL, AND IN RE SPONSE TO AN APPEAL BY THE LEGAL GOVERNMENT OF ZAIRE. WHILE THE PARLIAMENTARIANS MAY COMPLAIN ABOUT BEING LEFT OUT OF THE DECISION AND THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS EXCEEDED ITS AUTHORITY UNDER THE CONSTITUTION, ITS JUSTIFICATION AS AN EFFORT TO SAVE FRENCH LIVES IS A TOUGH ARGUMENT TO BEAT IN THE POLITICS OF PUBLIC OPINION. GISCARD'S SUCCESS IN JUSTIFYING HIS DECISION WILL DEPEND ON THAT OF FRENCH (AND OTHER EUROPEAN) TROOPS IN THE COMPLETION OF THEIR MISSION.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TROOP DEPLOYMENT, GOVERNMENT REACTIONS, EVACUATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 may 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978PARIS16108
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780212-0213
Format: TEL
From: PARIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780540/aaaabhhi.tel
Line Count: 190
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 883b8c9a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2637446
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LEGIONNAIRES TO ZAIRE -- INITIAL POLITICAL REACTIONS SUMMARY. FOLLOWING THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE GOF\'S
TAGS: PGOV, PEPR, PINT, CG, FR
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/883b8c9a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
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Declassified/Released
US Department of State
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20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014